









## More getting degrees without A levels

by John O'Leary

Growing numbers of students are enrolling on Diploma in Higher Education courses and going on to take degrees without the normal two A levels qualification, a survey carried out by the Department of Education and Science and the relevant colleges shows.

The research, published by the Association of Colleges Implementing Dip HE Programmes, reveals steadily rising numbers joining courses at 22 colleges and polytechnics. The number of full-time students covered by the survey topped 7,000 for the first time, compared with 536 last year and the greatest increase was in mature students and those with fewer than two A levels.

Of those starting the Dip HE last September, 61 per cent had fewer than two A levels compared with 43 per cent in 1973. More than 78 per cent were over 21—a 17 per cent rise on the previous figure. At two of the polytechnics with the largest Dip HE courses, Middlesex and North East London, the trend was even more marked. Only five of the 100 full-time students at NELP were under 21, while only 25 of the 232 full-timers at Middlesex had two A levels.

Middlesex Polytechnic has also carried out an analysis of its first three years of the DipHE course, which found that 60 per cent of students joined in their mid- to late 20s, leaving school at 16 or 17 with a number of O levels. Frustrated in

their jobs, the students looked to the DipHE as the route to a degree course.

Although formally qualified students tended to obtain superior grades in the first semester, the course narrowed later in the degree and there was no appreciable difference in the academic work of the various age groupings.

The Middlesex survey found that 70 per cent of those contacted felt that the course had fulfilled their aspirations and, generally, those transferring onto degree courses—45 out of 52 in July 1978—had performed as well or better than on the DipHE.

Mr John Davidson, secretary of ACID, says in the latest edition of the association's journal: "It has

been becoming even clearer in recent years the view of sceptics that the DipHE is largely being used as a way into degree courses for students without the usual two A level qualification. This in itself could be taken as ample justification for the DipHE movement if such opening of access could not have been brought about in any other way."

However, Mr Davidson, in an extension of the Middlesex survey covering 10 other courses, found that more than half the 264 students questioned would have taken the DipHE even if there had been no possibility of transfer. Nearly 70 per cent said they would consider leaving full-time education after the DipHE course if job opportunities existed.

## Women condemn policies

by David Jobbins

Women trade unionists have criticised in total opposition to Government policies which they say will reduce their chances of obtaining higher and further education.

The 50th Trade Union Congress Women's Conference called on the general council to urge the Government to reverse public spending cuts and expressed concern at their impact on education and training.

Meeting in Brighton last week, the conference backed a resolution from the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education claiming that advances towards equal opportunities for women were being seriously endangered.

It called on the general council to demand a "vigorous" action to defend what women had already achieved—and to restore and increase lost resources and opportunities in education and training.

Specific action demanded by the conference included:

- Restoration of resources to the Manpower Services Commission, in Training Services Division, and extension of the YOPS and TOS schemes to special-provision for women and girls.
- Extended mandatory grants system for all 16-plus students and mandatory grants for mature women students returning to study and training.
- Reversal of the policy of reducing opportunities for female entry to further and higher education.

Conference also backed a NATFHE motion calling for positive action to redress the inequality of treatment for men and women in further education.

It sought a Government inquiry into the causes of differences in the pay of men and women at released from employment for FE—opportunities which delegates already regarded as "inadequate" and demanded an expansion.

What happens to resolutions passed by the conference depends on the line taken by the TUC executive advisory committee and the TUC education committee and the general council.

NATFHE delegate Ms Patricia Lemaux was narrowly beaten for a place on the advisory committee. She was second runner-up but lost to a woman from the TUC. NATFHE members are hopeful that when the size of the committee is expanded possibly next year, the union may be successful in gaining a seat.



## Kent names new vice-chancellor

Dr David Ingram, principal of Chelsea College, London, is to be the new vice-chancellor of Kent University.

He will take up the post in October. For the past 16 months Dr Ingram spearheaded the successful campaign by the college to acquire the St. Mark and St. John site in North London, despite severe commercial competition.

Dr Ingram was educated at King's College School, Wimbledon, and the New College, Oxford, where he obtained a first class honours in physics in 1943, and as a research student at the Clarendon Laboratory, Oxford, in 1951.

He moved to Southampton University to set up a new research group in microwave spectroscopy and spent seven years there as research fellow, lecturer and reader. In 1959 he was appointed to the chair of physics and head of department at the University of Keele. He was also deputy vice-chancellor of Keele for two spells.

## Recall of quango urged

A call to the Government for the early resumption of the Advisory Committee for the Supply and Education of Teachers was made at an informal meeting of college principals and the leading teachers' union last week.

The meeting was written to the Department of Education to say that there is an urgent need for the reconstitution of ACSET at a time when so many problems face teacher education, particularly over supply.

The DES has for several months said that the reconstitution of ACSET, known as the Advisory Committee on the Supply and Training of Teachers until it ceased meeting in 1976, was imminent but so far there have been no signs of its re-emergence.

The meeting between representatives of the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education, the Association of Principals of Colleges, the Society of Principals and Directors of Higher Education formations was the first of a series of exploratory talks to consider setting up a Standing Committee on Teacher Education in the public sector. This was first mooted at a conference in January where it was felt that the formation of such a body was long overdue.

However, it was decided that before such a committee could be set up, investigations should be made of other teacher unions to see if they were willing to be held after Easter.

## EEC provides extra cash for joint study projects

The EEC is to extend the size of its grant scheme for joint study projects in member states, making money available for the first time for projects already developed with Commission support.

The scheme of grants for the development of joint programmes of study between higher education institutions in member states is now in its fifth year. More than 120 joint projects involving about 200 institutions across the Community have received Commission aid. There has also been an increase in the number of institutions seeking to extend bilateral programmes to

include a third partner. The grants, normally about 4,000 European units of account (£2,600), mainly cover the travel and subsistence expenses of those organizing the joint programmes, the arrangement of meetings necessary to plan and monitor them, the preparation and translation of course material and general programme information.

This year money will also be available for travel, staff and student subsidies for those taking part in existing Commission-supported programmes, and in these cases the grant ceiling has been raised to 10,000 European units of account.

Applications for grants can be made from university and non-university institutions of higher education and can relate to any academic subject. Projects must be of joint academic planning subject of joint academic planning between at least two institutions but the type of cooperation may vary widely. All grants awarded this year must last a minimum of three months.

So far, 27 British universities have been involved in this type of scheme, although a third of all institutions are in the non-university sector.

## Kissinger's calls remain secret

from Clive Cookson

WASHINGTON

Thanks to its famous Freedom of Information Act, the United States has the most open government of any major country. The Act, which was originally passed in 1966 and extended in 1974, has been of great benefit not only to journalists and the general public but also to scholars and researchers, especially social and political scientists and contemporary historians.

Recently, however, federal agencies have been trying to tighten up the Act and restrict the material they have to turn over to anyone who requests it. And the United States Supreme Court has consistently interpreted the law in the government's favour.

The major rulings announced by the Supreme Court last week introduced further limitations on the use of the Freedom of Information Act. The one that drew most attention was the decision, by a 5-2 vote, to require federal agencies to provide public access to transcripts of the telephone conversations of Henry Kissinger made as Secretary of State from 1973 to 1976.

The second ruling, which created less controversy but could have even greater long-term impact on the community, was that the records of a federally financed study be not subject to the Freedom of Information Act and may be kept secret.

While the Kissinger ruling was taken as a general condemnation from academic groups, the second decision was supported by the American Council on Education and the Association of American Medical Colleges. They argued that it would ensure researchers to know the results of their research and that the public and they would not risk premature or inaccurate dissemination of their results.

The case involved a request by a group of physicians, the Committee on the Care of the Diabetic, to see the records of a study of the effects of a new drug on the treatment of diabetes. The study was funded by the National Institute of Health (NIH).

The findings of the programme, and the NIH's action, created a big controversy in the medical community, and the Committee on the Care of the Diabetic, which disagreed with the conclusion, asked to see the raw data in order to check them. The NIH refused the request, made under the Freedom of Information Act, on the grounds that the data were the property of the researchers themselves and had not been seen by the NIH or FDA.

Writing the majority opinion, Supreme Court Justice William Rehnquist said the Act could not be used to extract data from private researchers funded by a government grant or contract even if the government used the results.

The dissenting opinion, signed by Justices Brennan and Marshall, said: "The understandable tendency of agencies to rely on non-governmental projects to perform research of importance to the public good is a commendable one. It is a major setback for scholars studying recent world events."

Nevertheless, in relation to the secrecy of the British Government, the United States remains a paradise for the scholar or journalist who seeks recent materials or information from the Government.



Dr Kissinger: ruling condemned

National Institute of Health (NIH), were used by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to restrict the availability of certain drugs for diabetes.

The findings of the programme, and the NIH's action, created a big controversy in the medical community, and the Committee on the Care of the Diabetic, which disagreed with the conclusion, asked to see the raw data in order to check them. The NIH refused the request, made under the Freedom of Information Act, on the grounds that the data were the property of the researchers themselves and had not been seen by the NIH or FDA.

Writing the majority opinion, Supreme Court Justice William Rehnquist said the Act could not be used to extract data from private researchers funded by a government grant or contract even if the government used the results.

The dissenting opinion, signed by Justices Brennan and Marshall, said: "The understandable tendency of agencies to rely on non-governmental projects to perform research of importance to the public good is a commendable one. It is a major setback for scholars studying recent world events."

Nevertheless, in relation to the secrecy of the British Government, the United States remains a paradise for the scholar or journalist who seeks recent materials or information from the Government.

The Kissinger case involved

## New York library wins Auden case

The New York public library has won the right to keep a major collection of notebooks and manuscripts by the late W. H. Auden. The library persuaded Manhattan Superior Court (a probate court) that Chester Kallman, an American collector and friend of Auden, had given the papers to its Berg collection.

Mr Kallman died in Greece in 1973, three months after sending his papers to the library, and his 86-year-old father, who was his heir, sued for their return. He alleged that they had been sent to the library for safe keeping, and that although his son intended to "donate" the Auden papers to the Berg collection eventually, the gift had not actually taken place.

The judge decided the library had proved that the legal requirements for making a gift were met by Mr Kallman before he died, and said the papers would be returned to the library being returned to his father.

The papers include correspondence with T. S. Eliot, George Bernard Shaw, Albert Schweitzer, Margaret Mead, R. G. Welle, Henry Moore, Benjamin Britten, Maynard Keynes, Bertrand Russell and Dag Hammarskjöld. Other works include manuscripts, diaries, and travel notebooks, sketches, photographs and reviews.

## Handwriting reveals author's intent

The handwriting in a novelist's manuscript gives away an astonishing amount of information about the emotions he or she felt at the time that he or she wrote the book. That is what Gunther Gotschalk, a professor of modern German literature at the University of California, Santa Barbara, has found after studying the manuscripts of several authors.

He first noticed handwriting changes while studying unpublished Hesse manuscripts in Germany and was sufficiently intrigued to make them a record of them as he worked. "I couldn't help but notice that Hesse would periodically shift from writing his 'G's' in a cursive style with wide loops to a more upright and sharp style, and from straight-up and-down lines to sharply slanted ones," Dr Gotschalk said.

"It couldn't be explained by fatigue or cramped position caused by reaching the end of a page on the edge of the desk, because these changes occurred early as well as late on a page and throughout the manuscript."

Dr Gotschalk counted the percentage of 'G's' in each page of the novel fragment *The Youth of Peter Bammann* and plotted every high peak corresponded to a page on which the character called Quorm appeared. "I almost didn't have to read the book to know what was happening, I could accurately predict when Quorm would appear."

## Huxley's collected papers find a home in Houston



Right: Julian Huxley at work in 1935.

The collected papers, diaries and notebooks of Sir Julian Huxley, the eminent British biologist and first director-general of Unesco, have been acquired by Rice University, Houston, in the United States.

More than half a ton of the works of Sir Julian—who founded the university's biology department in 1913 and who was first a research student and then assistant professor there until 1916, have been acquired.

The papers include correspondence with T. S. Eliot, George Bernard Shaw, Albert Schweitzer, Margaret Mead, R. G. Welle, Henry Moore, Benjamin Britten, Maynard Keynes, Bertrand Russell and Dag Hammarskjöld. Other works include manuscripts, diaries, and travel notebooks, sketches, photographs and reviews.

## Faculty union ruling hits campus pay negotiations

from our North American editor

WASHINGTON

At the University of New Haven the administration abruptly broke off negotiations with the faculty union for a new contract to replace the existing one, which expires at the end of May. At Villanova University an official faculty referendum about creating a collective bargaining unit affiliated with the American Association of University Professors was cancelled by the National Labour Relations Board at the request of the administration.

Both events were part of the early fallout from last month's ruling by the United States Supreme Court that Yeshiva University does not have to bargain with the union elected by its faculty members, because they are managerial employees not covered by the National Labour Relations Act (NLRA, February 29).

The overall impact remains uncertain, with different experts making different predictions. David Kucel, professor of labour relations at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, wrote in the *New York Times* that the Supreme Court had "annulled the death knell for faculty unions in private colleges and universities in the United States". But representatives of the three national teacher organizations (AATP, American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association) do not concede that their prospects are as bleak.

There is considerable disagreement about how typical Yeshiva University, a Jewish institution, is of independent higher education. Some say faculty members at most other institutions enjoy significantly less managerial authority than those at Yeshiva and may therefore not be affected by the ruling. Others claim that on the contrary most independent colleges and universities have a governance structure which is more academic and less managerial than those at Yeshiva.

Nevertheless, in relation to the secrecy of the British Government, the United States remains a paradise for the scholar or journalist who seeks recent materials or information from the Government.

In Congress, various agencies, including the CIA, are lobbying hard for the right to withhold more unclassified material. The result, according to the Organization of American Historians and the American Historical Association, would be a major setback for scholars studying recent world events.

Unions may be mobilized, for, as Mr Nielsen of the AFL pointed out, other unions representing academic workers are often threatened by the Yeshiva ruling, and they went to Congress to amend the law to make sure that not only academics but all professional workers have a right to unionize.

Such action by Congress could encourage state legislatures to make similar amendments to their laws, which cover state employees, including those in public higher education. Labour laws in the 25 states that permit public sector labour bargaining are often modelled on the National Labour Relations Act. Otherwise, observers say, academic unionization in public colleges and universities is likely to be hit by the knock-on effect of the Yeshiva decision.

Collective bargaining by faculty members started in 1968, and union contracts are now in force in about 230 four-year colleges and universities, of which 80 or so are private institutions. The pace of unionization has slackened a bit over the past two or three years, but the national organizations were looking forward to faster growth again during the 1980s as faculty members seek their protection against the consequences of declining enrolment and financial retrenchment.

At the University of New Haven the administration abruptly broke off negotiations with the faculty union for a new contract to replace the existing one, which expires at the end of May. At Villanova University an official faculty referendum about creating a collective bargaining unit affiliated with the American Association of University Professors was cancelled by the National Labour Relations Board at the request of the administration.

Both events were part of the early fallout from last month's ruling by the United States Supreme Court that Yeshiva University does not have to bargain with the union elected by its faculty members, because they are managerial employees not covered by the National Labour Relations Act (NLRA, February 29).

The overall impact remains uncertain, with different experts making different predictions. David Kucel, professor of labour relations at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, wrote in the *New York Times* that the Supreme Court had "annulled the death knell for faculty unions in private colleges and universities in the United States". But representatives of the three national teacher organizations (AATP, American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association) do not concede that their prospects are as bleak.

There is considerable disagreement about how typical Yeshiva University, a Jewish institution, is of independent higher education. Some say faculty members at most other institutions enjoy significantly less managerial authority than those at Yeshiva and may therefore not be affected by the ruling. Others claim that on the contrary most independent colleges and universities have a governance structure which is more academic and less managerial than those at Yeshiva.

Nevertheless, in relation to the secrecy of the British Government, the United States remains a paradise for the scholar or journalist who seeks recent materials or information from the Government.

In Congress, various agencies, including the CIA, are lobbying hard for the right to withhold more unclassified material. The result, according to the Organization of American Historians and the American Historical Association, would be a major setback for scholars studying recent world events.

Unions may be mobilized, for, as Mr Nielsen of the AFL pointed out, other unions representing academic workers are often threatened by the Yeshiva ruling, and they went to Congress to amend the law to make sure that not only academics but all professional workers have a right to unionize.

Such action by Congress could encourage state legislatures to make similar amendments to their laws, which cover state employees, including those in public higher education. Labour laws in the 25 states that permit public sector labour bargaining are often modelled on the National Labour Relations Act. Otherwise, observers say, academic unionization in public colleges and universities is likely to be hit by the knock-on effect of the Yeshiva decision.

## Education broadcasting needs co-ordinating, says report

The Government should set up a new structure to look after educational programmes, the Society of Education Officers says in a report in its response to proposals for a fourth television channel.

"There is widespread agreement in the education service that the existing arrangements for coordinating educational broadcasting are wholly unsatisfactory. With the arrival of the fourth channel, the need for a proper structure of coordination is all the more urgent," the society says.

It believes such a structure would ensure the effective use of scarce resources, prevent duplication of efforts, promote exchange of knowledge and expertise and encourage high professional standards.

The society argues that statutory provision giving a minimum proportion of broadcasting output, at least 15 per cent, to educational programmes, should be included in the Broadcasting Bill now before Parliament.

It suggests that a minimum safeguard should be included in the Bill requiring that this category of programmes is identified in some way

as educational so as to ensure regular monitoring.

The society wants a commitment from the IBA that all educational programmes will be cleared for off-air broadcasting. This would prove that the IBA is serious in its proposals to make the new structure of educational broadcasting wider and deeper than what appears on the screen.

Alternatively the Bill should be amended to facilitate recording by individual groups and so improve the chances of such programmes contributing to versatile and effective educational development.

The society says the IBA should encourage the Open University to examine its experimental and non-experimental programmes with supporting material and tutorial help to the new channel.

In view of the special implications of the fourth channel for the education service in Wales, the Society recommends that a formally empowered body with strong advisory powers be set up, with direct access to the controller of the fourth channel in Wales.

## Sheffield forms left group

Left wing academics at Sheffield University have marshalled their forces to break down the hostility which they claim affects many in higher education.

They have united to set up the Academic Group, membership of which now stands at 65, among the 937 teaching staff at the University.

"We are trying to bring the Left academics out of their theoretical ivory towers to confront the social and economic problems that are happening around them," says Mr Ankie Hoogvelt, the convenor of the group and a lecturer in sociology.

She says the group is trying to look at the effects of Government cuts in higher education. "In the wider context of the philosophy of modernism,"

they do not realize that acceptance of a policy is just as political."

But the first issues dealt with by the group have been both internal and external. The first was a discussion of a Treasury committee recommendation to axe the university's Russian studies department and proposed closure of the university library.

It appears to the group that the University Grants Committee is now merely carrying out Government cuts and not defending the interests of higher education.

Predominant theme of the support for the group is drawn from the social science departments—politics, sociology and economics. "But we have members from 17 departments," says Mr Hoogvelt, "including the sciences and engineers."

Earlier this week the group held a seminar on the Political Economy of the Government cuts, with papers read by two group members, and in May it plans a one-day national conference to "develop an alternative economic strategy."

But the first issues dealt with by the group have been both internal and external. The first was a discussion of a Treasury committee recommendation to axe the university's Russian studies department and proposed closure of the university library.

It appears to the group that the University Grants Committee is now merely carrying out Government cuts and not defending the interests of higher education.

Predominant theme of the support for the group is drawn from the social science departments—politics, sociology and economics. "But we have members from 17 departments," says Mr Hoogvelt, "including the sciences and engineers."

Earlier this week the group held a seminar on the Political Economy of the Government cuts, with papers read by two group members, and in May it plans a one-day national conference to "develop an alternative economic strategy."

But the first issues dealt with by the group have been both internal and external. The first was a discussion of a Treasury committee recommendation to axe the university's Russian studies department and proposed closure of the university library.

But the first issues dealt with by the group have been both internal and external. The first was a discussion of a Treasury committee recommendation to axe the university's Russian studies department and proposed closure of the university library.

It appears to the group that the University Grants Committee is now merely carrying out Government cuts and not defending the interests of higher education.

Predominant theme of the support for the group is drawn from the social science departments—politics, sociology and economics. "But we have members from 17 departments," says Mr Hoogvelt, "including the sciences and engineers."

Earlier this week the group held a seminar on the Political Economy of the Government cuts, with papers read by two group members, and in May it plans a one-day national conference to "develop an alternative economic strategy."

But the first issues dealt with by the group have been both internal and external. The first was a discussion of a Treasury committee recommendation to axe the university's Russian studies department and proposed closure of the university library.



defence of its achieved balance of power and security."







# Oxford's great English literature debate

## Course's strength comes from continuity

Some recent lively debate at the Oxford English faculty, which numbers well over 100, prompts these reflections on the case against fundamental reform of the English course offered at Oxford.

Without undergoing radical upheavals, the Oxford English course has developed from a study of language and literature to one of literature and language. The latter now occupies a (still important but diminished) place: all students must take a final paper in the history of English and study early literature in the original texts.

The Oxford course may have grown, if not "watered", then, some would say, "more slowly", but certainly more like a tree, adding things and shedding leaves, than like a house demolished and re-erected in novel style by its architect.

Its strength, much of it, like a tree's, hidden, comes from its unbroken continuity. While new ideas and approaches come from within and without—nearly half of the last 20 lecturers appointed were of non-Oxford origin—much that is tested is grappled with in hopes of steel.

Thus graduate students are still vigorously trained in paleontology or analytical bibliography, and related disciplines, their induction into scholarly method, being the envy of less happy faculties, where research and sometimes produce from their theses (or contributions to their field, the same indeed) is fostered. In undergraduates, who write rather than "read" for their degrees.

A large measure of freedom or independence characterizes the course for students and lecturers alike. Where lectures are not compulsory, those who give them have some scope to pursue their own interests, and to propagate their own interests in the recognizing a commitment to lecture at least once a year on a topic specified by the faculty as a major subject within the lecturer's competence.

The size of the faculty allows most major topics to be adequately covered, usually by more than one lecturer, so that diverse approaches and interpretations are offered to students. A student can study pretty well what they like, since the syllabus spans English literature from the beginning to the present day.

Students' unique status is recognized by the giving of the only author with a computer paper himself, the set-texts for Old English in Honour Moderations virtually prescribe themselves by virtue of their intrinsic value and obvious significance.

The main restriction students may encounter arises, in a college tutorial system, not out of the syllabus but from the disposition of individual lecturers. But since the latter are mainly appointed by the university and a college jointly, they generally possess a breadth of interests as well as specialist expertise, and a student's tutor wishes to be a minor (and flexible) constraint on the student's choice of a highly structured and abounding in precisely defined study areas and rank with prescribed texts.

The concept of a literary structure, a second, lending form to the course, can be clarified by some words of Professor W. W. Rostock in *English as a University Subject*: "English literature exists; its contents, its patterns, its relationships with the whole field of history and present experience cannot be fully lost to the practical purposes of a syllabus."

No criticism comes, too, much defined by the syllabus, and requires a course to bring the student up against a resistance in his subject matter, by making him

Dissatisfaction with the way English is studied at the University of Oxford has led to some students forming a pressure group to encourage reform.

Berlin this year the group arranged a debate to discuss the motion: The Oxford English Course is inadequate. Two dons and

two undergraduates argued the motion before an audience of 300 to 400 students and two senior members of faculty.

Today in the hope of stimulating further discussion of the way English Literature is studied in our universities and polytechnics, we publish articles by three of the leading protagonists in the debate.

find out for himself (my friends) the way in which the things which are studied are put together in the real world" (ibid).

We may ask whether "real world" refers to the society in which the literature was produced, or the world of ideas and values in which the author grew up or wrote, and certainly an English school thrives on contact with adjacent (and autonomous) disciplines; but this is not to argue that the best benefit is necessarily derived from joining English with a discipline (thereby inevitably diminishing as well as enriching each) or even by permitting a lavish array of special options thought by members of other faculties and available in place of substantial parts of the corpus of English literature, the "reconciliation" of which owes much to its integral wholeness.

Not merely do "composite" courses, as Rostock calls them, exist abundantly elsewhere, the Oxford model is almost without parallel, a fact which constitutes for some of its critics an argument for abolishing it altogether.

A highly structured course is incompatible with two other features valued at Oxford: comprehensiveness and continuity, which are linked to and even make possible the first feature, freedom. They are nearly but not quite the same thing—two aspects, as it were, of respect for the tradition as a whole, the formative power of which resides in its life in the present, extending to other kinds of life in the very remote past.

This respect encourages resistance to the narrowness that comes from partial knowledge. To study both *The Dream of the Rood* and *Wednesday* within a few days is to grow immensely in one's awareness of the scope and quality of religious poetry in the English language. Such awareness is preferable to the bigotry of the self-defensively ignorant. The chief opponents of Anglo-Saxon have mostly been those who have never read any.

The breadth of literary experience fostered by the Oxford course also protects against easy adoption of theories, fashions or prejudices. As against comprehensiveness, continuity has been more the cause of the historical shape of English literature, which only a chronological approach facilitates. All periodization is vulnerable to one or other objection, but that does not make it arbitrary, as one sometimes hears. It is much less arbitrary than the structuralist's arbitrary sometimes dictated by a "core-context" approach ("Literature and Revolution in the Romantic Period") or even, to a lesser extent, the genre-based one ("Tragedy"), though the latter may function effectively as a special option without begging too many questions.

The only serious criticism of the principle or principles of comprehensiveness-continuity is that it encourages a superficial acquaintance with a selection of authors and not the wide period-understanding aimed at. The growth of literary scholarship strengthens the case for allowing students to specialize, and at Oxford this is provided, not along with the general requirement of comprehensive coverage.

In both Mods and Finals students offer a pair of special papers, one in English and one in a related subject. These, if we count Shakespeare as a special subject, are roughly equivalent to the requirement in the pre-1970 syllabus to study Milton, and Chaucer as special authors in Finals. They are, respectively, (but now nearly all the students are available). The special papers, which, if the student wishes, be examined by means of an extended essay, instead of a written paper. The general principles concerning examination, which have always been

when "course reform" is in the air are too broad to discuss to any purpose here, but one aspect is worth defending in relation to English.

The proper place of memory in literary studies is misunderstood by enlightened reformers, who deem it a faculty more proper to porroths than to persons. In a modern context, memory should not be seen so much as a mechanism of information storage and retrieval as an instrument for intellectual and imaginative progress, a tool for training taste and discrimination and a pleasurable thing in itself. Positive and creative use of memory has been appreciated from Plato to W. H. Auden, but it is inevitably confused with mere rote-learning.

Yet to learn a good deal of prose and poetry by heart is a good way to acquire a real feel for rhythm, phrase and style, and it may even be that the "rote" memory of some students in scansion could be remedied by greater insistence on memorial exercises. At any rate, it is easier to distinguish, say, paraverse from half-rhyme, if one has memorized poems (from Old English to Wilfred Owen!) containing examples of one or other.

Memory is "the warden of the brain", locking out the caprices of extravagant fancy, admitting the recognizably new to house with the old. Written examinations encourage students to train their memories, and the best ones know instinctively that what they should know by heart is literature, not the points made in a score of essays, and that a critically trained understanding of the past will find no terrors in an examination paper and will avoid the still too common error of frenetically thrusting a hexagonal essay into the round cannon-like mouth of a question.

The Oxford course, which demands twice as many essays from students as most courses in departmental universities and imposes a reaching-into on faculty members double the national average, clearly presupposes students of high ability. Lacking this, even the excellent series and the generous ratio of lecturers to students, would prove inadequate.

Since a sure sign of the inadequacy of the course would be the failure or poor performance of students in the first class examinations, the results in the series and the generous ratio of lecturers to students, would prove inadequate. Since a sure sign of the inadequacy of the course would be the failure or poor performance of students in the first class examinations, the results in the series and the generous ratio of lecturers to students, would prove inadequate.

Attempts in the past to reform the syllabus or to gauge student opinion have been tired and unimaginative. These have been limited or worse to vague and unhelpful faculty-approved questionnaires, at best to minimal alterations to examination and syllabus rubric.

Neither of these have confronted the problematic questions which define the study of literature itself. But both have since the system of tenure and stand as a testament to the academic naivety and ideological resistance within the faculty or present. Unthreatened by contemporary academic developments, and protected by internal examination and selection procedures, these problems remain obscured by the mystique which surrounds Oxford.

The joint committee of undergraduates, the only available body for reform, has proved to be ineffectual. Their meetings are eight "elective" under-graduates and "many" done only in Oxford because "it is not in place". But it remains remarkably the case that there is very little student involvement in the formulation of questions across the

cannot, being free above all from the petty tyranny of set books and the more grandiose subjection of hyper-structured courses, often themselves only compounded of a range of prescribed texts and topics.

It is easy for radical reform to reduce the area of individual freedom: to kill a tree you need only lay axe to root. But a recent and thorough survey of the opinions of junior and senior members of the syllabus elicited no general mandate for radical structural reform. Only a third of the junior members answered their questionnaires, and the more radical proposals were so mutually contradictory as to be unrepresentative of those who replied—that the faculty was able to propose for adoption only a range of suggestions that would command majority support, and these turned out to be such redemptive of the existing scheme as re-orientation and the opportunity to effect one or two specialist authors in Finals.

It would appear primo facie that a large number of students have no interest in seriously changing the course. Their radical critics may call them apathetic, but it is beyond possibility that they actually appreciate what they have. It is not necessary to lose one's freedom in order to learn to value it.

An English school which has pro-

Putting the case against fundamental reform of Oxford's English course is Carl Schmidt, fellow and tutor in English at Balliol College.

On the other side Terry Eagleton, fellow and tutor in English at Wadham College, and Daniel Baron Cohen, a third-year undergraduate at Worcester College, argue the need for reform.

## Students 'dependent' on flexibility of the tutor

Students are notoriously restless; they are idealistic, critical of the past and moribund of the present. Regularly they depict the tutorial environment as unfulfilling and conducive to frank academic discussion, the tutor as insensitive to and involved in the continual revaluation of his or her subject.

This does not appear to describe the prevailing attitude in the faculty today. The continual emphasis on the tutorial system, the tutor's preoccupation in their own research and the "market value" of the Oxford degree leave the English faculty fragmented and static.

In addition, the claims that the non-disciplinary nature of the tutorial study and the consequent looseness of the syllabus encourage an "individualism of style and approach" conceal the faculty's abdication of pedagogical responsibility. Such responsibility hardly seems to affect the brighter students; but in the average student it induces a complacent apathy and muddled scholarship.

Attempts in the past to reform the syllabus or to gauge student opinion have been tired and unimaginative. These have been limited or worse to vague and unhelpful faculty-approved questionnaires, at best to minimal alterations to examination and syllabus rubric.

Neither of these have confronted the problematic questions which define the study of literature itself. But both have since the system of tenure and stand as a testament to the academic naivety and ideological resistance within the faculty or present. Unthreatened by contemporary academic developments, and protected by internal examination and selection procedures, these problems remain obscured by the mystique which surrounds Oxford.

The joint committee of undergraduates, the only available body for reform, has proved to be ineffectual. Their meetings are eight "elective" under-graduates and "many" done only in Oxford because "it is not in place". But it remains remarkably the case that there is very little student involvement in the formulation of questions across the

duced as much and as varied distinguished criticism and scholarship as has Oxford—not only the OED Supplement but *Essays in Criticism*, too. Plainly his good things which have stood the test of time, Oxford may not be a "model"—who would want such a thing?—but it is certainly an example. Its ideal of mature judgment. And a mature judge is someone who knows how to avoid a badly constructed lecture or walk out of a "seminar" which has degenerated into a bore-fest.

If one is to have an image of studying English, let it be that of a poem or a novel crystallizing in a fresh, potently discovered phrase in the mind of a silent reader in a quiet room, but a reader able to get up and talk to others when he is so moved. It is no doubt one of the parous sists of Oxford English that flood of able candidates apply to read it yearly and, when post fall vacant, able lecturers at other universities elect to apply for them.

Or perhaps the Hemingwayan dismissal of the course by a speaker in the faculty debate as "all washed up" bore a deeper meaning than its author perceived. It is fashion and abstraction that are the only flotsam; the steady tide is better construed as wisdom.

Carl Schmidt



David Smith

## on flexibility of the tutor

assessment of the present course and the teaching of it, an appeal to establish college seminar groups and a list of less widely recommended books. The book list was intended to complement the reading encouraged by the syllabus thereby indicating its representativeness; a responsiveness which the areas neglected or under-emphasized; a responsiveness which the faculty itself is hardly aware of.

A mid-term debate was organized to follow this broadsheet. The Oxford English Course is inadequate. The debate was of central importance, not least because it opened communication within the faculty to the students of large and prevented the programme from appearing in any way alien or intolerant. It was almost jeopardized right at the very start by the complacency it sought to undermine. Having decided that the motion should be presented by the dons and two students, the group was invited to 12 of the more well-known dons in the faculty. All but one declined to participate. Having secured two undergraduates, the group decided to reduce the number of debaters to four. An urgent letter was quickly drawn up requesting any senior member of the faculty to come to defend the present course. Out of a senior faculty of more than 70, a tutor from Balliol College was the only one to accept.

The motion was presented to the English faculty on February 15. In order that the future discussion might be encouraged, no vote was held. Significantly though there were no speeches from the floor in favour of the present English course.

The collectively composed paper read out at the debate permitted the group to elaborate upon its criticisms, expressed in the broadsheet. Vis a critique of the examiner's report the paper set out to analyse how the "learning gap" between expectation and performance which characterizes the student's response to the examination, might be encouraged by some change in the way the course is taught. The paper suggested that the issue of critical theory, which has been the subject of much discussion in the faculty, should be brought into the foreground of the course itself.

The paper drew parallels between the isolation in the colleges and the isolation in the individual

ham in the examination rooms, all of which were expected to lead to a "variety and responsibility in scholarly attitude". The examiner's most frequent complaint however is that the "canon is severely restricted", and the paper continued: "under the continual pressure of the examination system candidates do not experience English literature in the breadth which is one of the course's most advertised features". The comprehensiveness of the syllabus (with its emphasis on certain "special authors" and on the most special of authors, Shakespeare) is the tradition of allowing the candidates to select the "important" authors in the period papers (which span some 800 years), effectively constitute an "undefined programme which militates against exactly the breadth of study it is supposed to facilitate".

The paper then moved to its central criticism of the course; the neglect of critical theory. The neglect of critical theory, the speaker in the motion, praised the Oxford approach to the study of literature in being unrestricted and unopinionated. But the speaker on behalf of the group pointed out that the examiners at least, however innocently, were exercising certain theoretical approaches.

Appos of the Shakespeare papers the examiner's assessment were "Many candidates, including some good and even very good ones, were surprisingly blank about character. No doubt this reflects current critical practice... the effect was often unfortunate. Even Cleopatra was flattened by a student's into what they called a 'symbol'."

The Romantic poetry paper had been received as dismissively. Paradox and irony headed the critical vocabulary this year, closely followed by solipsism, dialectic, and often sophisticated terminology was used to a smokescreen for basically silly and vague ideas. Certain forms are to be castigated as jargon, the issue of critical theory, which has been the subject of much discussion in the faculty, should be brought into the foreground of the course itself.

The paper drew parallels between the isolation in the colleges and the isolation in the individual

finals), the speaker asked: "From where, within the course, is the undergraduate to obtain a grasp of critical theory that is logical, specific and eloquent... It seems unlikely that the faculty considers that criticism is too activity only for candidates of above modest ability; it is surely the practical business of all undergraduates." The primacy of individual response walks hand in hand with the options of "classical" and "modern" texts, and a "sense of the distinctive quality of the period" all of which define the boundaries of acceptable theory. Acceptable theory which many universities at home and abroad have long since abandoned.

This refusal to give criticism its proper status as a theoretical tool for literary study is reflected in the stocking of libraries and in the paucity of tutors available to teach it. Instead it is relegated to the status of a specialist, a "room" as it were, which is not a part of the self-consciousness. In the critical commentary paper which candidates must offer in their first public examination the speaker noted that the examiners had described many candidates as weary and confused: "Many would hardly have recommended themselves at the scholarship or 'topscore' examination."

Regression is not education but the group's paper finally placed its emphasis upon the general question of a formulated aim with the primary emphasis given to the material over the seminar, the text over its context, to individual response over historical reasoning and to this sense of "the whole of English literature", the aims of the course remain undiscussed and undefined.

The speaker for the group concluded by precisely for a lack of definition of both aims and methods that the students flounder in the generalities of the course and take the relatively easy way out of "arbitrary specialisation". To accuse the course of widely felt inadequacies on these grounds is not to demand that the faculty provide a "line", a "doctrine", but that the faculty actively engage in their teaching, to the development of an informed self-consciousness to this premises and the methods of our study here."

Daniel Baron Cohen

## Seeing through the empiricist illusion

"English literature", revealed a member of the Oxford English faculty recently, "is there". Where, exactly? Why does Burke seem to be there but not Bentham, Macaulay but not Marx? Because Marx was German? But Joyce was Irish and he seems to be there all right. Or because Marx didn't write fiction? But neither did Macaulay, not officially anyway; so perhaps he is there because he wrote fiction. But then so did Marx, who did in fact write fiction. I don't think Macaulay did write all that finely anyway so can we refuse to teach him to the group that he didn't write *Lays of Ancient Rome*, which aren't fine but are certainly fiction. Were Shakespeare and Johnson "English literature" when they wrote their plays or only afterwards? Can you stop being there or are you there for good? Where is Naipaul, or *The Thes*? When did Newman stop being somewhere else called theology and move here, wherever that is? It is naturally hard to accept that you are a specialist in a non-subject. Most English faculties, merely by their existence, perpetuate the ideological illusion that there is indeed some unruptured entity called English literature, even if they make perfunctory gestures to what is tellingly termed "background".

But English literature is in fact a theoretical construction, and a heavily loaded one at that: there are always strong ideological currents at work in the selection of texts, and the history of literary criticism is a history of ideological battles. The ideological illusion that there is indeed some unruptured entity called English literature, even if they make perfunctory gestures to what is tellingly termed "background".

Exams are not the main issue in Oxford since they look likely to survive the abolition of the monarchy. What is at issue is open debate about the theoretical assumptions which, often unconsciously, underlie the selection of texts. Such debate cannot be once and for all; it must be a central feature of any course of literary studies. 1740 to 1832 is not a "time" it is produced. What alternative production might be possible can only be fully explored in the light of theoretical argument.

The point is not that "radical" is a bad word, it is that it declares its ideological bias.

Terry Eagleton

whereas most orthodox criticism does not. In a way one can sympathise with the orthodox critic's irritation. The more he or she tries to read the stuff straightforwardly, the more the Marxist, formalist and structuralist obscure its plain meaning with their newfangled theories. It is important to recognise that most orthodox critics genuinely do hold the naive empiricist view that their own readings are theoretically innocent.

The Oxford students who are at present calling for a systematic grounding in literary theory—an odd call, anyway, in the ears of dons for whom all students are potential shirkers—do so not because they wish to straitjacket the Oxford English course into some unquestionable orthodoxy, but because they have seen through the empiricist illusion. Which isn't, after all, very difficult when you are told that "signifier" and "deep structure" are objectively "structural", whereas "symbol" and "organic unity" are not.

Another request some students are making is that dons should stop pretending that literature exists in an historical vacuum. To which some dons riposte that the Oxford course is indeed structured historically, 1740 to 1832, for example. What kind of historical period is that? Only old-decay, or Stockingian, would claim that students faced with such a "period paper" could do more than pluck from it a handful of major authors, in more or less total abstraction from the historical, cultural and intellectual factors which shaped them.

It isn't in the least accidental that English courses tend to encourage such abstraction: severing the nerve between those pieces of writing from time to time dubbed "literary" and other material practices in a society is a convenient enough way of foreclosing some pressing ideological questions.

In any case, the apparently generous scope of a paper entitled *English Literature 1740-1832* thrives upon a tight underlying consensus: the student is allowed to wander from one to the other, because on the whole he or she is encouraged to ask the same kinds of question.

"I suppose we can't do Brecht until next year," a first year undergraduate asked me glumly the other day. Her gloom deepened considerably when I broke the awful news that English language and literature meant exactly what it said. The rampant chauvinism which balked large in the original establishment of English as a university discipline is alive and well in Oxford, even if it has been modified elsewhere. So is the traditional academic paranoïa about undergraduates' independent work, or collaborative projects, or indeed anything which promises to sever students from discrete, competitive units into intellectual colleagues.

When Oxford English students come together in double-figure numbers they have to keep quiet, as they are either being lectured to or scribbling a studied, delicate, 50-minute response to poetic subtleties in an examination room. As does and never seem to attend lectures, they meet en masse mainly in the examination schools, which is suitably symbolic. For however many alpha-graphed essays you might have back in college, and whatever the liberal humanist self-delusions about following the argument wherever it may lead (as King as it doesn't lead to film, feminism, fascism, Flaubert, popular fiction), the examination is what counts. It is true that some notices are best tested by the system, just as some are best tested by strapping people to the wall and whipping them; it is questionable whether universities should actually pander to such personalities.

Exams are not the main issue in Oxford since they look likely to survive the abolition of the monarchy. What is at issue is open debate about the theoretical assumptions which, often unconsciously, underlie the selection of texts. Such debate cannot be once and for all; it must be a central feature of any course of literary studies. 1740 to 1832 is not a "time" it is produced. What alternative production might be possible can only be fully explored in the light of theoretical argument.

The point is not that "radical" is a bad word, it is that it declares its ideological bias.



with higher education. There is, to repeat, any gloomy tale, not one that can be told. continued on page 1



[illegible]



C. J. S. Clarke is lecturer in the department of mathematics at the University of York.

**Oxford  
University Press**



# BOOKS

## Ways ahead

Telephone: Wakefield 823971



















### Union view

The author is principal lecturer in sociology at Sheffield City Polytech-



